Implementing Eating Disorder Prevention in School Counseling Programs

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Eating disorders are rapidly increasing in young girls. Agents such as television and magazines are contributed to the belief that appearance is important (Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodlin, 1986). The media’s consistent perception of being thin as beautiful cause young girls to have negative body image perceptions of themselves if they do not fit into this category.

According to Woolston (1983), eating disturbances during childhood have greater impact on growth and development than at any other time in life, this in turn, may result in hypertension and high cholesterol during adulthood (Gunn & Stevenson, 1985). Eating-disordered behavior can also affect school performance, learning and behavior (Pearson & Long, 1982).

School Counselors play a vital role in not only the prevention, but also early intervention of eating disorder behaviors. They are in contact with students on a daily basis, and have the opportunity to monitor behavioral changes around food, weight, and body shape; act as role models for students; positively influence a wide range of the at-risk population for developing eating disorders; and convey important messages about healthy behaviors and stress management (Powers & Johnson, 1999).

Incorporating information about eating disorders into guidance programs is one of the most effective approaches available to school counselors dealing with students who are high risk or who are already displaying behaviors of an eating disorder (Hedrick, 1984). It is important for school counselor to have techniques ready and available to assist them in identifying and intervening with children who are at high risk of becoming eating-disordered adults (Rhyne-Windkler & Vac, 1989).

School counselors are very busy, and may not always have time to design new programs. There are many practical components that can be implemented into a program. Counselors can choose appropriate interventions, based on student’s needs and school personnel (Scott & Waack, 1993). Classroom guidance activities can be presented by school counselors focusing on issues related to nutrition. Some examples of lesson topics include-body-esteem and self-esteem (Streigel-Moore, et al., 1986), locus of control (Steiner, 1982), approval-seeking behavior (Stoeber, 1980), and body image and nutrition (Lenihan & Sanders, 1984)

In conclusion, school counselors serve an important role in the overall process of identifying, preventing, and initially treating students with eating disorders. Early intervention and prevention efforts implemented by school counselors are important to increase positive body image and encourage children and adolescents to develop healthy lifestyles, free from physical and psychological danger of eating disorders (Bardick, A, Berries, K, McCullough, R.M., Witko, K., Spriddle, J., Roest, A., 2004).

Bardick , et al. (2004) recommends for counselor to (1) use affective educational materials to build self-esteem and develop coping skills, (2) conduct in-service training for teachers, (3) maintain a supply of brochures for teachers, parents, and students concerning eating disorders, and (4) remain current in knowledge of eating disorders and referral sources.

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